DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 534 CS 012 855

AUTHOR	Haneline, Douglas; Aiex, Nola Kortner
TITLE	Asking the Right Questions: Reading Assignments That Work for Writing. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CS-97-03
PUB DATE	97
NOTE	3p.
CONTRACT	RR93002011
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- ERIC Publications (071) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Objectives; Higher Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; *Reading Assignments; Reading Writing Relationship; Relevance (Education); *Student Needs; Student Research; *Teacher Role; *Writing Assignments; Writing Improvement
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; Ferris State University MI; *Knowledge Acquisition

ABSTRACT

This digest considers the one thing that all English teachers do--make reading and writing assignments. It addresses 4 questions whose answers should determine the nature of the reading and writing assignments given by teachers: (1) who are the students? (2) why are the students in college? (3) what is the nature of the course in which the assignment is being given? and (4) what are the desired outcomes of the assignment? (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-97-03

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150
D122
Bloomington, Indiana 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

ED 409 534

Asking the Right Questions: Reading Assignments That Work for Writing

by Douglas Haneline and Nola Kortner Aiex

This Digest considers the one thing that all English teachers do--make reading and writing assignments. Since learning to do this well is so basic that, if you can't do it, you are likely to be headed for some other occupation, there is no point in pretending to have a formula for producing good reading and writing assignments that other English teachers don't already know. A reminder, however, about what goes into the preparation of even the shortest in-class exercise--as well as a long research project--might be in order. Four questions can be raised whose answers determine the nature of the reading and writing assignments we English teachers make. (For a research foundation, see Irwin and Doyle, 1992).

I. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

Many of today's students are older and more career minded than those of even a few years ago. For example, Ferris State University, where I, Douglas Haneline, teach, is an open-admissions state university in Michigan. The programs emphasize career preparation in health, business, and technical subjects, so the students, while often quite directed in terms of career goals, have extremely varied educational backgrounds, reading levels, and writing skills. Since their level of general knowledge is frequently low, the use of casebooks to create common background among the students is one effective technique (Haneline, 1994). Since every paper in the course is written on a subject from the casebook, the students' acquisition of knowledge is progressive: with each assignment, they have learned something more about the topic.

Douglas Haneline is a Professor of English at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan; Nola Kortner Aiex is an Assistant Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication.

II. WHY ARE THE STUDENTS IN COLLEGE?

The students at Ferris State are there because they have certain career goals and college is the way to fulfill them. This means that post-graduation is a major--though not the only--consideration. Part of an English teachers's job at Ferris State, then, is to make the students more employable, to give them skills in research, reading, arguing, and editing, as well as habits of listening, following directions, being meticulous, and finishing their work on time. Their teachers also want them to learn more--about the world, about being good citizens, about language, about themselves.

III. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE COURSE IN WHICH THE ASSIGNMENT IS BEING GIVEN?

In my case, I teach multiple sections of a sophomore-level research writing course. These students have already taken at least one, and, if they needed developmental English, two writing courses in college. Prior to that, of course, they have had as many as twelve years of language instruction in elementary, junior high, and high school. If they graduate with a four-year degree from Ferris State, they will take a junior-level writing course or a cluster of writing-intensive courses after the sophomore-level course. At the end of my course, I want my students to do library research, read skillfully for information, argue and persuade (Crowhurst wrote in 1991: "Persuasive writing is cognitively difficult...but the ability to write persuasion can be improved by instruction"), reason from data, prepare simple graphics, and be more self-sufficient in writing, organizing, and editing their own work. Any assignment given in English 250 is geared toward these goals, and they are reachable goals.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

One technique that helps students improve their reading and writing skills is the use of a reading log. By writing while reading, students can learn to organize their thoughts, and after habitually writing in response to reading, they can learn to clarify and refine their thoughts. Through activities centered around the reading log, the students can elucidate several aspects of their thought processes: using the reading log as a "response journal," they can discover ideas; using it as a "text-into-meaning journal," they can rethink ideas; and using it as a process journal," they can regulate their reading habits (Cobine, 1995).

IV. WHAT ARE THE DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THE ASSIGNMENT?

The reading part of the assignment involves students taking in information and making it their own. The English teacher's role in making this happen means that he or she has to allot sufficient time for students to read often complex material. "A reader, like an actor, may have to get to the end to know how to deal with the beginning...reading is not merely decoding" (Root, 1991). The teacher also has to schedule discussion time in class—and, bear in mind, most young Americans today are not as print-oriented as older generations are. The instructor needs to guide them, usually in an individual conference, toward a focus that they will actually be able to write on. This usually means little topics, not big ones. Each assignment should call for a specific written product, and the product should be geared toward invisible but important learning and performance goals. So that, "...By writing about something individuals come to know more than they did before writing" (Schumacher and Nash, 1991).

Readers have probably divined from my remarks so far that I believe that English teachers should have fairly specific expectations in mind when they ask their students to read and write. In my case, this is done on purpose. I tell the students that I am not the last person who will judge their writing, but that I may be the last person to reveal what his or her judgments are. So I prefer to sin in the direction of being overly specific.

All students, however modest their abilities may seem at times, can learn a great deal about reading and writing, and possession of these skills can open up real possibilities in their working and personal lives. For teachers, researchers, and all who are concerned with education, the creation of new knowledge and the reconceptualization of old knowledge is of immense importance (Schumacher and Nash, 1991). To prepare our students to function in the workplace and to give them the basis of career and personal growth, we teachers need to challenge them, while at the same time we need to offer them a helping hand when they need it. We may then help them become the selves that are present but latent inside them.

References

Cobine, Gary R. (1995). Writing as a Response to Reading. ERIC Digest. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse and Reading, English, and Communication. [ED 386 734]

Crowhurst, Marion (1991). "Interrelationships between Reading and Writing Persuasive Discourse." *Research in the Teaching of English*, 25(3), 314-38. [EJ 432 611]

Haneline, Douglas (1994). "Developing a Multiperspective Viewpoint for Written Argumentation: The Case for Casebooks." Paper presented at the Spring Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (Portland, OR). [ED 375 434]

Irwin, Judith W., Ed., and Mary Anne Doyle, Ed. (1992). *Reading/Writing Connections: Learning from Research*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. [ED 343 117]

Root, Robert L., Jr. (1991). "The Virgule Variations: Learning/Language/Literature." *English Journal*, 80(6) 18-27. [EJ 432 520]

Schumacher, Gary M., and Jane Gradwohl Nash (1991). "Conceptualizing and Measuring Knowledge Change due to Writing." *Research in the Teaching of English*, 25(1), 67-96. [EJ 422 658]

This publication was prepared with partial funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RR93002011. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement